

Herbs for Pasture - Beneficial Plants
ALTERNATIVE VETERINARY MEDICINE CENTRE
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HERBS FOR PASTURELAND

The link between [nutrition](#) and health is so fundamental that it is not surprising that herbs can provide a valuable source of 'medicine' for grazing animals (e.g. horses, ponies, cattle, sheep, goats, llamas etc.), simply via their nutritional content (esp. minerals). The fact that they also provide some pharmacologically-active ingredients, in many cases, is a huge bonus. It is an injustice to call so many of them 'weeds'.

Animals are very attuned to their eco-system, when allowed to roam and when fed and husbanded in a near-natural manner. Because of this, they self-medicate, given the opportunity (zoopharmacognosy). This is more by way of maintaining health than curing illness, in most cases, although stories abound of seriously ill animals healing themselves, when released onto the Prairie in the USA or into the New Forest, the Breck or the Romney Marshes, in the UK.

It is my belief that a variety of herbs should therefore be available to animals, on a self-help basis, to provide a powerful force for strong growth and development and for a robust immune and healing system. It could be argued that such provision is a welfare measure. These herbs can be part of pasture sward but it stands to reason that there should be a 'reserve', since farming confines larger numbers of animals on a given acreage than Nature would allow, which means that the grazing animals will eat out the herbs very rapidly from open grazing ground.

On a farm, headlands, roadways, woodland, hedges, gateways and, perhaps, dedicated land must provide the reserve. There follows a list of herbs that I believe can be valuable to horses and farm animals. Not all are necessary, on any given unit. Some will not grow on every type of land or in every habitat. Some are very deep-rooting, which therefore provide a way of dredging up minerals from deeper in the ground than grass swards can. These can therefore

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be used as fertility accelerators, in that they could be grown and then returned to the soil as a form of green manure. It will not escape the reader's notice that many of these herbs would be dubbed 'weeds', in a conventional farming sense.

| | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Agrimony | Hawkweed | Restharrow |
| Alfalfa | Hawthorn (Berry) | Rosemary |
| Angelica | Hedge Mustard | Rue |
| Avens | Hemp Agrimony | Sage |
| Balm | Herb Robert | Scabious |
| Bedstraw | Hogweed | Selfheal |
| Borage | Hops | Sheep's Sorrel |
| Burdock | Horehound | Shepherd's Purse |
| Burnet | Horseradish | Sorrel |
| Calamint | Ivy | Speedwell |
| Centaury | Jack by the Hedge | Sunflower |
| Chamomile | Knapweed | Thistle |
| Chervil | Lady's mantle | Thyme |
| Chickweed | Liquorice | Toadflax |
| Chicory | Mallow | Vervain |
| Clary Sage | Marigold | Vetch |
| Cleavers | Marjoram | Water Avens |
| Clover (Red) | Meadowsweet | Watercress |
| Coltsfoot | Medick | Willow |
| Comfrey | Melilot | Witch Hazel |
| Cornflour | Milk Thistle | Woodruff |
| Couch | Milkwort | Wood Betony |
| Cowslip | Mint | Yarrow |
| Cranesbill | Motherwort | Yellow Rattle |
| Cuckoo Flower | Mouse Ear | |
| Daisy | Mullein | |
| Dandelion | Nettles | |
| Dill | Parsley | |
| Eyebright | Penny Royal | |
| Fat hen | Peppermint | |
| Fennel | Pimpernel | |
| Fenugreek | Plantain | |
| Feverfew | Primrose | |
| Flax | Purslane | |
| Fumitory | Ramsons | |
| Garlic | Raspberry | |
| Goats Rue | Rattle (semi-parasitic) | |
| Groundsel | Red Clover | |

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It stands to reason that habitat requirements for some of these will rule out their presence in some pastures. For instance, some will not compete with grass and some require water or wetland. On a farm with varied habitats, including a river, however, this does not present a problem. Soil type will also influence the success of establishment of certain herbs on any given farm.

Summary

For a herbivore, it stands to reason that the majority of nutrients should be obtained via plant material. The modern questionable fashion of ‘chelating’ minerals recognises the importance of organic combinations for improving availability of minerals. I would assume that the natural context of **plant tissues and molecules** would provide a **safer, better and more effective** source. Soil licking (possibly not so valuable on chalk land) or the provision of ‘straight’ minerals is a further possible source, which is compatible with Nature. To offer animal-derived materials, for nutrients or medication for herbivores, is clearly of dubious wisdom, decency and safety.

Herbal medicine is as old as animal life. Its pedigree is well-proven. It is of doubtless value in veterinary medicine. Its use in farming has, however, not been strong, owing perhaps to expense and practicalities. If herbs are provided as part of a whole-farm programme, in the manner suggested above, I foresee a central rôle for them, in animal health.

N.B.: This is simply an effort to apply logic to a ‘mysterious’ subject. Much is author’s opinion, therefore not ‘scientifically’ verified.

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